

Historic Movement for Accountable and Functional Administrative System

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Today's world the effectiveness of duty and profession-based administration is widely accepted. Employing the right person for the right job yields positively in any administration. There is no such profession as a generalist's now-a-days. Bureaucrats who run the state administration in Bangladesh think that they are capable of accomplishing anything and everything. These government officials believe that they can perform any job with the highest skill and this belief has led them to be quite indifferent towards other officials' professional skills and knowledge. These are the very bureaucrats who have long been placed at the helm of our government ministries, corporations and boards etc. They just rotate from one ministry to another and from one corporation to the other. No where the stay is a prolonged one. According to them, this shift from one administrative discipline to the other adds to their experience as bureaucrats. They take immense pride in thinking that they have worked in so many disciplines in a short expanse of time. But this short-lived stay in each of the various ministries does not in any way help them in having faith and commitment to any discipline that they might have worked in. For this can very easily free themselves from taking any big responsibility or shouldering any guilt for their failures. Above everything, the free access of these 'generalists' often bars the way promotion for the very deserving and experienced technical personnel in the profession.

Actually, this type of bureaucratic practice has been so deep seated in our administrative system that it hampers prompt government decisions on development projects of any kind. One has to climb almost 113 bureaucratic tiers before approval of any project. When a project is experimented and tested by a government department or organisation, it goes to the concerned ministry for approval. But the high officials of the ministry who yet again test and approve the project rarely have any expert knowledge about the issues involved. So, they often waste time in approving such projects. And because they do not have any prior knowledge about the projects, they often make wrong decisions and burden other professionals involved with their decisions which sometimes jeopardise the project itself. At last it is the professionals in the field who are victimised.

On policy making and implementation, it was mentioned at a survey of the Civil Officers' Training Academy in 1984 (which came out in the World Bank report during 1984-85) that it took as high as 1770 days and on an average 284 days, to decide national policies. This lethargic state of administrative pace still prevails very much in this country.

Till 1989, various donor countries and the World Bank gave Bangladesh a total sum of two billion US dollars for carrying out its development schemes. But much of the planned schemes still remains under the labyrinth of official files due to faulty administrative system, delay in policy making etc. If the state things continues as it is now, then the future seems to be a very gloomy one for this country.

With the end of the British Raj in Bengal, the much dreamt about social and economic emancipation could not be achieved even in the 24-year Pakistan rule. One of the car-

cultural shows are arranged every evening. Most of the cultural performances are by engineers and their wives — a group of which includes some of the best known TV actors and singers. Besides, the variety performance by members of their family is a treat to watch. A colourful Meena Bazar is organised to raise funds for charity and various social welfare activities of IEB.

Annual Conventions of IEB are thus periods of intense intellectual activity for its members and delegates from home and abroad. The deliberations of the National Seminar, Technical Sessions and invited Lectures contribute significantly to the dissemination of new ideas for solution of national problems and intra-country and inter-country transfers of technological knowledge. It is no wonder that all persons interested in engineering and technology eagerly wait for this event every year.

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At the 16th Convention of Engineers' Institution, Pakistan, the then President, Engineer M A Jabbar said, "If the technologists claim a right to more effectively participate in the activities of the state, this must not be construed as a technocratic claim for power but because of the growing significance of

the power of District Development Coordination and the engineers and other professionals suffered as a consequence. The professionals, again in 1983, submitted a memorandum to the government pressing their demands through IEB and after repeated discussions with the government.

After the enforcement of autocratic rule in 1982, few reforms that were taking shape during 1978 and '80 were again jeopardised by the vested quarters. In the name of Upazila, 838 members BCS (Admin) cadre was increased to a 5,500-member cadre. In the Secretariat, 60 to 65 per cent posts of Deputy Secretaries and Joint Secretaries were reserved for the members of the administrative cadre. The posts of DCs which were dismissed in 1978 were again brought into effect and the DCs entrusted upon the power of District Development Coordination and the engineers and other professionals suffered as a consequence. The professionals, again in 1983, submitted a memorandum to the government pressing their demands through IEB and after repeated discussions with the government.

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After the formation of the present democratic government, time to time from April 1991 to February '92, Engineers' Institution and BCS Coordination Committee submitted memorandum to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. After repeated attempts to meet the Hon'ble Prime Minister the PROKRICH-BCS Coordination Committee could submit its memorandum to her again in June, 1992 by holding a grand conference. Then after reviewing the professionals' demands, till January '93 political leaders, Members of the Parliament and intellectuals expressed their solidarity with the demands pressed by PROKRICH-BCS. On January 17, 1993, in a seminar organised by the IEB, 17-point demand for administrative reforms was placed before the government. Then on April 15, 1993 after the meeting of the PROKRICH-BCS leaders with the PM, she readily accepted a few of its demands and placed other demands before the Cabinet Committee for review. As a result the movement was declared postponed for a brief period of three months.

Since there was no positive response from the government till July 16, the delegates' meeting of the PROKRICH-BCS Coordination Committee declared its action programmes from July 17 to October 19 and from October 19 to December 31. But the government could till then do no better than form a committee to review the pos-

ibilities of an administrative reform. Besides, Coordination Committee members, like Abu Hena, Engineer Khademul Islam and Yusuf have been harassed by the government on several occasions.

The demand for a duty and profession-based administration or historic movement for accountable and functional ad-

ministrative system is not a new one. The 17-point demand is also nothing new. These demands have been recognised in many republics. Some quarters have started propaganda against these rightful demands. This movement was not waged for mitigating the insatiable power-thirst of a particular professional group. It is a move-

ment to reform the administration and salvage it from all possible evils within. It is a movement that would create a new system, a new order, which is pure and free of any corruption. As no sensible citizen of the country would want that a professional group is looked down upon and discriminated against in any way, the demands are rightful. Let us all join hands in establishing this new system.

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